

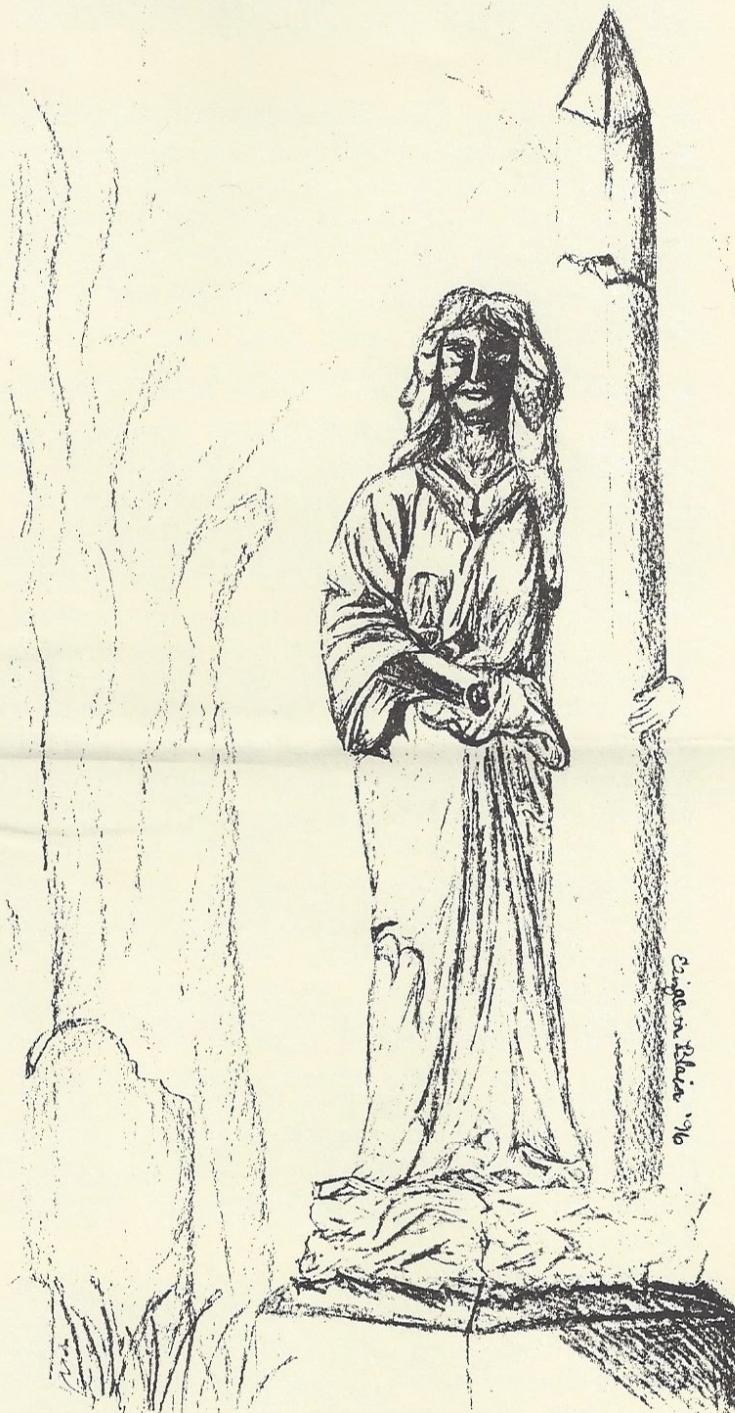


Suffolk-Nansemond Historical Society

There is history in all lives.

Volume 5, Issue 2

May 1996



almost unkempt wilderness into a place of symmetry and attractiveness."

In spite of a growing problem with vandalism, Cedar Hill is still a place of great beauty and serenity. The final resting place of a Lieutenant Governor, a Speaker of the House of Delegates, a president of the Garden Club of Virginia, a three-star general, educators, historians ... walking through Cedar Hill is like walking through the pages of Suffolk's history.

Join us on Sunday, May 19, at 4:00 p.m., as we explore old Cedar Hill Cemetery. Insect repellent is suggested. Walking shoes are recommended. Refreshments will be provided.

Cedar Hill Cemetery

In 1802, the Town of Suffolk purchased 2½ acres of the old Constantia farm for the purpose of building a community chapel. The Anglican Church (at the intersection of present day Church Street and Western Avenue) had been abandoned at the end of the Revolutionary War. Interest in the new denominations had grown and those who still worshipped from the Book of Common Prayer needed a place as well.

So the town built a simple frame structure there on the hill. Baptists, Methodists, and Episcopalians (blacks in the balcony, whites downstairs) used the little meeting house at various times during any given month, and people were buried on the church grounds--whites, some blacks, Indians, and, during the War Between the States, some Federal soldiers as well as Confederates.

This shared house of worship was used at that site for several decades. One by one, the white denominations built their own houses of worship. Eventually, Macedonia African Methodist Episcopal Church, established in 1870 and the first Negro congregation in Suffolk, moved the building to Pine Street where it is still in use today, with additions and a brick facade.

The burial ground continued to be used and became crowded. More of the Constantia farm was purchased and, later, still more. Once there was a bridge over a stream called Hickman's Branch that was between the town and the hill. Over time the Branch was filled in or silted in and now it is part of the Cemetery as well.

The spot was first known as Green Hill Cemetery, and it is unclear when the name "Cedar Hill" was adopted. Perhaps the name was given by Wilbur John Kilby, who was Superintendent of Cedar Hill from 1887 until his death in 1907. He was born in a house that still stands at the entrance to the old burial ground and he was Judge of the Nansemond County Court (1896-1904). According to the brochure entitled "A Walk Down Main Street," it was he "who turned an

Notes from the President's Calendar

● **February 24** — Lafayette's visit caused quite a stir, just as it did in 1825. Thanks to **John Harrell** and friends, the honored guests were delivered by carriage first to the Woodwards and later to Riddick's Folly.

Our hospitality committee, **Sue Burton, Barbara Carter, Sylvia and Dick Pond, Joyce Saecker, and Lillian Stroud** provided a cocktail party fit for royalty! The catered dinner was very nice and **Linda Consolvo's** desserts were to die for. **Chris and Karen Jones** were our special guests and I believe everyone enjoyed an unusually fine evening.

Sue and I shared dual stress as my dress, worn by Ann Burton in 1976 for the U.S. Bicentennial, was so tight I feared I might faint and Sue dressed so quickly her "Gibson girl" hairdo was about to fall apart any time. Thankfully, I didn't faint and her hair remained atop her head!

Thanks to **Ann and Jacob Woodward** for finding the Lafayettes (**Drs. Frank and Elizabeth Day**) in Williamsburg.

● **March 2** — S-NHS joined Riddick's Folly for Folly's *Yesterday and Today Fashion Show*. **Pearl Harrell, Janice Thomas, Mary Lawrence Harrell, Ann Woodward, Kay Rawles, Mindy Mottley, Erin Vansickle, and Linda Consolvo** modeled vintage fashions originally worn by Dick Pond's great grandmother, Delphenia Copeland; Marie Woodward; Tom Brothers' great aunt, Fannie Turner; Vallie Farnell; Ann Burton; Margaret Dashiell; and Betsy Brothers.

● **March 7** — Sue and I spoke to the **Rotary Club** and **Euell Williams** provided a slide presentation about Main Street houses and buildings.

● **March 11** — The Annual Covered Dish Supper and Business Meeting was held at the Folly. The new charter and bylaws were adopted and a new board of nine members was elected to serve for 1996-98. **George Consolvo** reworked the charter and bylaws and made all the copies. We are greatly indebted to him. Also, I wish to thank the Nominating Committee, **Barbara Carter, Mary Lawrence Harrell, Pearl Harrell, Lynn Rose, and Dorothy Williams**, for their hard work in securing nine board members. The board later met and elected officers.

The Rev. Melvin Boone was our speaker. Dr. Boone is Pastor of Metropolitan Baptist Church and played a significant role in the renovation of East Suffolk School into a community center. He has spent his life being involved with his community and his achievements are many.

Dr. Boone and Dr. Douglas Naismith co-chair a new committee concerning the renovation efforts for **Suffolk High School**. This renovation is in the city's plans for the next two or three years. This is of great concern to many of us. (*Please read the Main Street R & R article.*)

● **March 15** — **City Manager Myles E. Standish** invited Sue and me to lunch to discuss issues of mutual interest. We try hard not to bombard Mr. Standish with our many concerns--I'm not certain we succeed. We are extremely grateful to have such a good working relationship with the city. We need them and we think they need us as well.

● **March 18** — At St. Paul's Church, **Barbara McPhail** chaired a **Main Street R & R** meeting. The attendance was good and concern about Main Street houses was evident. Hopefully, results will materialize as we delve into new ventures. We have a lot to learn--get aboard, learn with us and see what a difference a few people can make!

● **March 27** — The VDOT meeting was held in Suffolk. Those attending were: **Bob Chisom** from Downtown Suffolk Association; **Sylvia Pond, Tom and Sue Woodward**, and I from the S-NHS; **Richard Holland, Richard Harris, and Tom Hines**, as well as other city staff. **Tom Woodward** was our speaker in support of the ISTEA grant for the train station. Sue and I met several of the gentlemen on the Transportation Board and later joined **Mr. Prettyman**, our representative, and showed him the station. We should hear from the grant this month--keep your fingers crossed!

● **March 28** — Sue, **Barbara McPhail**, and I had a meeting with **Johnny Leggett** concerning the two properties in front of his business. They are great old houses and we are anxious about their condition, future, etc.

● **April 2 & 3** — I went along with a van load of Suffolk women to visit the restored train stations in South Hill and Danville. It's great fun and educational to see how other towns are using their special old stations. How they got the money is of great interest to me.

● **April 4** — **Mary Lawrence Harrell, Barbara, Sue, and I** met with **Doug Naismith** to talk about **Suffolk High School**.

● **April 8** — Our first board meeting was held

following the March business meeting. The group will meet on the second Monday of each month.

● **April 15** — This day brought back childhood memories for Barbara and me as we joined Sue and **School Superintendent Joyce Trump** for a tour of Thomas Jefferson School. It looks the same as it did when I was in **Miss Anna Goode Turner's** second grade class.

● **April 16** — The **Suffolk Art League** hosted 41 Richmonders to the area for a council of the Virginia Museum Architectural Tour of Suffolk and Smithfield. **Sue Woodward** provided the historical background for the Suffolk Tour. They visited the c. 1927 Hines House, now the home of **Mr. and Mrs. Fleet Smith** and the 1969 Smith House, where Fleet grew up, which is now the home of **Mr. and Mrs. Peter Pruden**.

● **April 22** — This sunny day was perfect for a tour. Sue and I joined the **Junto Book Club** from Chuckatuck on a trolley that **Tommy Hines** helped us get. We rode all around town and Sue delighted all 23 ladies with her great stories and vast knowledge of Suffolk streets, houses, and people. **Riddick's Folly** provided a delicious lunch and interesting tour. Fun for all--we learned never to take a trolley into Cedar Hill!

● **April 25** — Linda Consolvo and I took **City Manager Myles Standish** and **Public Works Director Tom Hines** on a tour of the train station.

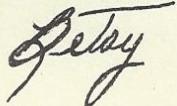
● **April 29** — Euell, Sue, and I took our Main Street lecture and slide show to the **Kiwanis Club**.

● **May 1, morning** — Several of us met with the **Mayor and the City Manager** about **Suffolk High School**. **Barbara McPhail** prepared a short report presenting some ideas about usage. It was a good meeting and we feel we must not wait to have our ideas heard. We would love to hear your ideas and visions for this wonderful building. Give us a call.

● **May 1, afternoon** — Linda Consolvo, Sue, and I attended an open house for the **Department of Historic Resources** in the new Portsmouth office. The agency can be of great benefit to us.

Yes--we've been busy and I decided to write this report from my calendar, so all of you can see what is going on from day to day.

Enjoy the sunshine and maybe I'll see you soon down at the station.



Upcoming Events

MAY 19 - *Cedar Hill Cemetery, 4:00 p.m.*

MAY 27 - *Memorial Day Observation,
Cedar Hill Cemetery, 11:00 a.m.*

OCTOBER 14 - *S-NHS Fall Meeting*

DECEMBER 7 & 8 - *S-NHS's 21st Annual
Candlelight Tour*

Did you know?

Constance Road, which was constructed in the 1950s as a fast way around downtown, was named for John Constant, but misspelled. It was to have been Constant's Road. Once the mistake was made, it was never corrected.

Donations to S-NHS in Memory of Marion Joyner Watson

Mr. & Mrs. John P. Beneke, II

Mrs. William M. Birdsong

Mr. Joseph E. Brantley, Jr.

Mr. & Mrs. Tom S. Brothers

Dr. & Mrs. W. Holmes Chapman, Jr.

Mr. & Mrs. Andy Damiani

Miss Evelyn P. Daughtrey

The Honorable & Mrs. Robert E. Gillette

Mr. & Mrs. James E. Gordon

Mrs. Nathaniel T. Gray

Mrs. Constance Reid Happel

Dr. & Mrs. W. H. Higinbotham, Jr.

Mr. & Mrs. James F. Hope

Mrs. Melvin Lovelace

Mr. & Mrs. Thomas J. O'Connor, III

Mrs. John Henry Powell

Mr. C. Edward Roettger, Jr.

Mr. & Mrs. Charles H. Rose, Jr.

Ms. Kathleen W. Smith

Mr. & Mrs. Robert A. Spivey

Mrs. Godfrey W. Stancill

Mr. & Mrs. Burwell R. Winslow

Mr. & Mrs. Thomas L. Woodward, Jr.

Tom Smith Camp - Sons of Confederate Veterans

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Betsy Brothers
539-6312

1st Vice-President

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2nd Vice-President

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and Lee King

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Linda Consolvo

Hospitality

Pat Snyder

Main Street R & R

Barbara McPhail

Membership

Elizabeth Gordon

Newsletter & Programs

Sue Woodward

Publicity

Dana Adams

Scrapbook

Joyce Saecker

Constantia House



The Constantia House as it stood in Cedar Hill Cemetery. By the early 1990s, vandalism had become a terrible problem. The DAR, unable to keep up with the constant need for repair, offered the building to anyone willing to move it. Robert Baker accepted that task and today the beautifully restored replica stands behind R. W. Baker & Company Funeral Home on West Washington Street.

From *History of Suffolk and Nansemond County, Virginia* by Ann H. Burton

1720 – First Buildings

DWELLING AND WAREHOUSE

Little is known of a definite character about the first family to establish itself at the site which was to become Suffolk. The founder of this family was John Constant, possibly from Hampshire, England. He built both a home and a warehouse on the south bank of the Nansemond River around 1720, probably slightly before. There is definite record of the operation of the warehouse (tobacco) by 1730. Shingles used in the construction were put on with wooden pegs, since this was long before the day of a plentiful nail supply. This warehouse was used to store ammunition during the Revolutionary War; it was torn down by the Yankees during the War Between the States.

The house escaped the ravages of both wars but fell into disrepair. Cedar Hill Cemetery developed all around it. The *Suffolk Herald* on January 3, 1883, reported:

"The remainder of Constantia farm, after cutting off a portion of it for the cemetery, was sold at public auction on the 27th of December (1882) for one thousand dollars. Mr. George F. Young of Providence, R.I., was the purchaser."

During the enlargement of the cemetery the house was demolished. Through the efforts of the local chapter (Constantia Chapter) of the DAR, a replica of the house has been built on the very site of the original. It is called Constantia House.

The little settlement that sprang up around the two structures was known as Constant's Wharf or Constant's Warehouse. John Constant must have died there, for later records refer to the property of the Widow Constant.

Constants do figure in the early history of the Kentucky and Illinois regions, for men with both the given and the surname of Suffolk's founder are known to have served with Daniel Boone and with George Rogers Clark, according to the Genealogical Editor of the DAR Magazine.

Main Street R & R (Restoration and Reuse)

On May 1, 1996, Betsy Brothers, Linda and George Consolvo, Barbara McPhail, Elizabeth Gordon, and Sue Woodward met with the Mayor and City Manager concerning Suffolk High School. The following report was distributed and discussed.

The issue of what to do about Suffolk High School has been discussed now for four years. We have all watched, wondered, and waited to see what would happen to this building that is so much a part of our lives and our community. Now, we are on the threshold of moving forward, and it is important to discuss and weigh all the issues involved with renovating and using an old building like SHS. We need to have a vision for the future of Suffolk, and we must consider the long term effects of the use of this building. It can either be an asset to the community that many people will use and enjoy, or it can be a shadow of its former self used only by a few who are not able to contribute anything to the surrounding area. The renovation of Suffolk High School can have a positive impact on the surrounding area only if it is used in a way that will benefit the whole community.

The Suffolk-Nansemond Historical Society is pleased to know that an effort is being made to renovate Suffolk High School. We support this effort and would like to help determine how the building will be used. We are all proud of the direction the city is moving and hope to share some ideas on positive ways to use Suffolk High and the surrounding facilities.

In the Downtown Development Report submitted on January 17, 1996, it is stated that:

"The City's Central Business District and the surrounding neighborhoods have a tremendous intrinsic value in that these areas cannot be replicated. There is a strong desire to preserve the character and flavor of the urban area to ensure that the City's history and cultural heritage continue to exist."

With this statement in mind, Suffolk High School is steps away from the CBD and is the most imposing and important building in the city. As such, the whole community can profit from using SHS for something other than Social Services. We believe in a multipurpose use of this facility.

As stated by the superintendent, SHS is the only existing building in the city that is big enough to house the school board offices. This would be an appropriate use and hopefully present the opportunity to set up a schools museum. Also, it is extremely important to the community to keep the auditorium intact. Everyone in Suffolk would benefit from having this facility available for concerts, performances, meetings, conferences, public forums, etc. Rental income could be generated from using the auditorium this way. It is the only place in the city that has the seating

capacity for over 600 people. Portsmouth has Willett Hall, Norfolk has Chrysler Hall, and Virginia Beach has the Pavilion. Doesn't Suffolk at least deserve the auditorium at Suffolk High School?

After having visited the Social Services building, it would appear that it is already in a good location. Perhaps the Extension Service offices could move out and be housed at SHS. Also, if the Senior Citizens Headquarters were to be moved to the ground floor of SHS, they could use the gym and other facilities and the building on Main Street could be sold as a source of revenue to the city.

When the courts move out of the municipal building, 22,000 sq. ft. of space will be free. Surely this will help ease the space problem for city offices. It also seems ideal to have the city continue to use the office buildings on West Washington Street. What will happen if you vacate these buildings? Will they stand empty like so many others?

Do you consider Suffolk High School as part of the CBD? If so, and I believe that is your intent, your study clearly states on page 25 that if SHS is used for Social Services:

"Retail sales from new users of this building is expected to be minimal because the agencies which are expected to occupy the building are destinations in and of themselves. Constituents of this level of public service, typically low and moderate income families, do not demand a higher level of business services."

Can we stop this process and reevaluate the possible use of SHS before it is too late? Please have a vision for the future. Let our old school serve as a focal point of community pride and spirit. Make it a place we can all be proud of and come to for many different activities.

In this plan for the future, Thomas Jefferson should also be considered for use as a center for the arts. Studios for classes in dance, theater, art, galleries for works in progress and expanded programs would be an ideal use of this building. This use would feed over into the auditorium and old gym in SHS.

We ask you to give the public a chance to have some input on the question of usage for SHS. Let people know what is happening with this building and give them the opportunity to express their opinions. We want what is best for the community, city employees, and Suffolk High School. Before it goes too far, let's consider all the options.

The Suffolk-Nansemond Historical Society applauds your efforts and your concern for the cultural and historical legacy of Suffolk. Please consider some of our ideas and know that we hope to involve the whole community in this project to save Suffolk High School.

Marion Joyner Watson
1928-1996

Marion Joyner Watson, the Historian of Suffolk, departed this life on March 30, 1996. She was the daughter of the late Dr. George Richardson Joyner and Lucile Bowie Joyner. Although she was born in Winchester, Virginia, she grew up on Chestnut Street in Suffolk and was a Suffolkian to the bone.

Marion had retired from the Virginia Division of Motor Vehicles after 22 years of service as a license examiner. Her life's work, however, was the preservation of Suffolk's history. Her brother Dick once said that if Marion could be carried back in time to Suffolk a century or two ago, she could walk down the street, greet people by name, and know where they lived. Probably so.

A charter member of the Suffolk-Nansemond Historical Society and its historian for 30 years, Marion was passionate about our past. She worked tirelessly, selflessly, and doggedly collecting and recording all the bits and pieces that make our history.

Someone said that Marion was a historian with a heart. That is true. She did not look at the people who are part of our history in a cool, dispassionate way; rather, she enjoyed the humorous, pitied the pitiful, and respected those she deemed deserving of respect. Vance Mann, Rector of St. Paul's Episcopal Church, where Marion was a lifelong member, says that Marion loved the history because she loved the people.

The people of St. Paul's knew about Marion and her approach to history very well. One of her pet retirement projects had been to organize, document, and record the more than three centuries that St. Paul's had served Suffolk and Nansemond County.

Marion continued to concern herself with the Society even in the last weeks of her life, telling us about another story we needed for a second volume of *The Quiet Regiment*. Most of the publications available from the Historical Society resulted from Marion's work.

Marion is survived by her daughter, Frances Watson Clark of Richmond; her grandchildren, Katherine and Philip; and her brother and sister-in-law, Dick and Betty Joyner of Durham, North Carolina. She leaves a host of friends from all walks of life.

Marion Watson's memory and significant contributions to her hometown will live on for centuries. She was our historical conscience as well as our living history book. Her death will have an enormous impact on our Society and we must work diligently to continue her good work. We miss her presence, her knowledge, and her wit. She's at rest in Cedar Hill Cemetery surrounded by old friends on a hill she often visited. We miss you, dear friend.

The Tom Smith Camp of the Sons of Confederate Veterans has decided to name its dinner in October of each year, the "Marion Joyner Watson Annual Banquet." Its purpose will continue to be to honor a person for his or her past historical efforts. (A timely note: Col. Thomas W. Smith was responsible for raising the funds for the Confederate monument atop Cedar Hill. It was erected in memory of his fallen comrades.)

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Name _____ Telephone _____

Address _____

Annual Dues (Jan.-Dec.) _____ Individual, \$10.00 _____ Family, \$15.00
Please mail with your check to: Suffolk-Nansemond Historical Society, P.O. Box 1255, Suffolk, VA 23439-1255

IF YOUR LABEL HAS A DOT, THEN PERHAPS YOU FORGOT - DUES FOR '96.



PROPERTIES BOUGHT FOR RESTORATION

THE WOOD HOUSE

400 North Main Street - c. 1845-1850

New Owners

Mr. and Mrs. Tom Brothers
Mr. and Mrs. Phil McPhail

This house was built after the Great Fire of 1837. Mary Taylor Riddick of Riddick's Folly lived here after her husband's death in 1845. She left the house to her daughter, Julianna Riddick Wood. Thus, the name, the Wood House.

OLD POST OFFICE

354-358 North Main Street - c. 1785
400 North Main Street - late 19th century

New Owners

Mr. Robert Babb and Mr. Russell Warren



This old home, on the right at the entrance of Cedar Hill Cemetery on North Main Street, was built after the Revolutionary War. The fire in 1837 swept away everything north of this residence, but this home and the homes to the south were saved.

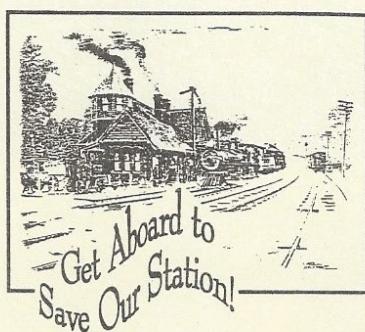
SAVE OUR STATION UPDATE

HALLELUJAH!

AT LAST, WE OWN THE STATION!

Marion, I know you're up there smiling.

Many people have worked hard to save our station, but I would especially like to thank the following people: Bob Chisom for his help with contacting CSX officials and getting the grant together along with city staff, Lynette W. Brugeman and Mark Woodward; George Jenkins for spending many hours surveying and researching the station property and providing us with the final plat to send to CSX; George Consolvo for providing legal assistance and expertise in negotiations to finalize the purchase agreement between our property company and CSX; Jim Caton for securing the building--one more time; other city staff and Robert Nelms who made contacts with state and federal officials for support of the ISTEA grant; and especially to all of you for being a part of and supporting the Historical Society and the SOS Campaign!



Hard work, great patience, caring, sharing and giving--this is what it has taken to achieve these goals. Thank you all!

PHOTO HIGHLIGHTS



Janice Thomas modeling Ann Burton's 1938 dress at the Fashion Show.



Betsy and Sue at the Lafayette Dinner.



Pearl Harrell in Delphenia Copeland's bathing suit.